

Groups and Leadership

Social psychologists consider a group to be composed of two or more people who interact and depend on each other in some way. Examples of groups include a baseball team, an Internet listserv, a college psychology class, and a cult.

Features of Groups

Groups usually have the following features:

- Norms that determine appropriate behavior
- Roles that are assigned to people that determine what behaviors and responsibilities people should take on
- A communication structure that determines who talks to whom within the group
- A power structure that determines how much authority and influence group members have

Example: A college psychology class has norms, such as when people should arrive for class. The professor's role includes teaching, inviting discussion, and administering exams. The students' role is to attend class, listen to lectures, read materials, and pose questions. The communication structure of the class demands that students listen without talking to each other while the professor lectures. The power structure gives the professor more authority than any of the students. Some students also may have more authority and influence than other students, such as those who are more familiar with the class material.

Conformity

Conformity is the process of giving in to real or imagined pressure from a group. In the 1950s, the psychologist Solomon Asch did a famous study that demonstrated that people often conform.

Asch's Conformity Study

Asch recruited male undergraduate subjects for the study and told them that he was doing research on visual perception. He placed each subject in a room with six accomplices. The subject thought that the

six were also subjects. The seven people were then given a series of easy tasks. In each task, they looked at two cards, one with a single line on it and the other with three lines of different lengths. The people were asked to decide which line on the second card was the same length as the line on the first card. On the first two tasks, the accomplices announced the correct answer to the group, as did the subject. On the next twelve tasks, the accomplices picked a line on the second card that was clearly a wrong answer. When put in this situation, more than one-third of the subjects conformed to the choices made by their group.

Factors that Influence Conformity

Asch and other researchers have found that many factors influence conformity:

- **Group size:** Asch found that group size influenced whether subjects conformed. The bigger the group, the more people conformed, up to a certain point. After group size reached a certain limit, conformity didn't increase any further.
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- **Group unanimity:** Asch also found that subjects were much more likely to conform when a group agreed unanimously. If even one other person in the group disagreed with the group, a subject was much less likely to conform. This was true even when the other dissenter disagreed with the subject as well as the group.

Researchers have found that conformity also increases when:

- A person feels incompetent or insecure
- The person admires the group
- The group can see how the person behaves

Reasons for Conforming

People have many reasons for conforming:

- They want to be accepted by the group, or they fear rejection by the group. In this case, the group is exerting normative social influence.
- The group provides them with information. In this case, the group is exerting informational social influence.
- They want a material or social reward, such as a pay raise or votes.

- They admire the group and want to be like other group members.

Productivity in Groups

Research shows that productivity tends to decline when a group of people are working on a task together. This happens for two reasons: insufficient coordination and social loafing.

1-Insufficient Coordination

When many people work on a task, their efforts may not be sufficiently coordinated. Several people may end up doing the same portion of the task, and some portions of the task may be neglected.

2-Social Loafing

Social loafing, which contributes to declines in the productivity of a group, is the reduced effort people invest in a task when they are working with other people. Diffusion of responsibility contributes to social loafing. A person does not feel as responsible for working on a task if several others are also present, since responsibility is distributed among all those present.

Social loafing is particularly likely to happen in the following circumstances:

- When the group is large
- When it is difficult to evaluate individual contributions to a task
- When people expect their coworkers to pick up the slack

Social Facilitation

In some circumstances, individuals perform better when other people are present. This phenomenon is called social facilitation. Social facilitation is more likely to occur on easy tasks. On difficult tasks, people are likely to perform worse in the presence of others.

